

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3210
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY

S E C R E T MANAGUA 2327

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, NU
SUBJECT: ENCOURAGING FREE ELECTIONS IN NICARAGUA

REF: MANAGUA 1506

1. SUMMARY: DURING COURSE OF 1976, AMBASSADOR URGED DEPARTMENT TWICE TO CONSIDER DESIRABILITY OF INFORMING PRESIDENT SOMOZA OF U.S. INTEREST IN FREE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN 1978 IN PREPARATION FOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN 1981. THIS PROPOSAL WAS EMBODIED AND ARGUED IN PARM FORWARDED TO DEPARTMENT IN MARCH 1977. DEPARTMENT IS AGAIN REQUESTED TO FOCUS ON ISSUE AND TO AUTHORIZE AMBASSADOR TO MAKE REPRESENTATION TO SOMOZA TO LIFT MARTIAL LAW AND CONVEY TO HIM THAT U.S. CONCERN FOR PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS IN NICARAGUA EMBRACES CIVIL AND POLITICAL LIBERTIES, INCLUDING FREE, HONEST ELECTIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. DURING COURSE OF OFFICIAL CONSULTATIONS IN MID 1976, THE AM-
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BASSADOR SUGGESTED CONVEYING TO PRESIDENT SOMOZA THE IMPORTANCE ATTACHED BY U.S. GOVERNMENT AND AMERICAN PROPLE TO FREE AND HONEST ELECTIONS. HE URGED THE DEPARTMENT TO CONSIDER POSSIBILITY OF SOME FORM OF U.S. SUPPORT FOR FREE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN 1978 IN PREPARATION FOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN 1981, BUT NO DECISION WAS REACHED.

3. PROPOSAL THAT U.S. GOVERNMENT (USG) CONSIDER ENCOURAGING FREE, HONEST MUNICIPAL AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS WAS AGAIN RAISED WITH DEPARTMENT IN MARCH OF THIS YEAR IN PARM (SEE REFTTEL). THE PARM UNDERLINED IMPORTANCE WE ATTACH TO EARLY MOVEMENT ON THIS ISSUE IN ORDER TO FOSTER MORE FAVORABLE POLITICAL CLIMATE FOR ANTI-SOMOZA OPPOSITION TO ACTIVELY CONTEST ELECTIONS. OPPOSITION FORCES ARE DEMORALIZED AND IN DISARRAY IN PART BECAUSE OF BELIEF THAT SOMOZA REGIME WILL ENGAGE IN ELECTORAL FRAUD TO RETAIN POWER, VITIATING THEIR POLITICAL EFFORTS. FREE ELECTION ISSUE IS ALSO CLOSELY RELATED TO LIFTING OF MARTIAL LAW (IN EFFECT SINCE DECEMBER 1974) INASMUCH AS CENSORSHIP AND LIMITATIONS PLACED ON POLITICAL RALLIES IMPEDE READINESS AND WILLINGNESS TO ANTI-SOMOZA OPPOSITION TO SERIOUSLY CONTEST ELECTIONS. AMBASSADOR HAS MADE CLEAR TO PRESIDENT SOMOZA ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS OVER PAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS OUR INTEREST IN EARLY END TO MARTIAL LAW BUT HAS NOT YET ADDRESSED THE ISSUE OF ELECTIONS.

4. SECRETARY VANCE'S STATEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY AT UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA (APRIL 30, 1977) CLEARLY INCLUDED THE PROMOTION OF CIVIL AND POLITICAL LIBERTIES AMONGST THE OBJECTIVES OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY. IF DEPARTMENT AGREES WITH US THAT DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS SHOULD BE SUPPORTED IN NICARAGUA THROUGH MORAL SUASION AND OTHER APPROPRIATE MEANS, THEN IT IS NONE TOO SOON THAT WE CONSIDER COMMUNICATING OUR POSITION TO PRESIDENT SOMOZA AT EARLIEST OPPORTUNITY. THE GREATER THE LEAD TIME, THE GREATER THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCCESS. THE SOONER THE ANTI-SOMOZA OPPOSITION PERCEIVES THAT THEIR VOTES WILL BE REFLECTED FAIRLY IN THE RESULTS, THE MORE LIKELY THEY WILL SERIOUSLY CONTEST ELECTIONS. THE EARLIER PRESIDENT SOMOZA IS ALERTED TO OUR INTEREST, THE MORE TIME WE SHALL HAVE TO ENCOURAGE
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HIM TO ENSURE FREE, OPEN ELECTIONS OVER NEXT FOUR YEARS.

5. AN APPROPRIATE APPROACH FOR INITIALLY RAISING THIS ISSUE WITH PRESIDENT SOMOZA WOULD BE ALONG THE FOLLOWING LINES. USG ATTITUDE

IS THAT NATURE OF OUR FUTURE RELATIONS WITH NICARAGUA DEPENDS CRITICALLY NOT ONLY UPON AVOIDANCE OF VIOLATIONS OF INTEGRITY OF PERSONS BY NATIONAL GUARD BUT ALSO ON NICARAGUAN GOVERNMENT (GON) RESPECT FOR CIVIL AND POLITICAL LIBERTIES, INCLUDING FAIR, HONEST ELECTIONS. USG CONSIDERS THAT LIMITATIONS ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS AS A RESULT OF MARTIAL LAW CONSTITUTE A MAJOR IMPEDIMENT TO HISTORICALLY CLOSE, COOPERATIVE RELATIONS. ADDITIONALLY, USG VIEWS FREEDOM OF OPPOSITION TO PREPARE FOR 1978 MUNICIPAL AND 1981 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, AND FOR THOSE ELECTIONS TO BE FAIR AND HONEST, TO BE A CRUCIAL TEST OF THE GON'S RESPECT FOR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF CITIZENRY.

6. WE WOULD NOT EXPECT ANY IMMEDIATE FAVORABLE RESPONSE, ESPECIALLY IN LIGHT OF POSSIBLE SUSPENSION OF FY 1978 SECURITY ASSISTANCE

PROGRAM. SOMOZA'S REACTION IS LIKELY TO BE THAT THIS EXTENSION OF OUR HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY CONSTITUTES FURTHER U.S. INTERVENTION IN NICARAGUA'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS AND VIOLATES HEMISPHERIC STANDARDS OF RESPECT FOR SOVEREIGNTY. HOWEVER, THE TIMING SHOULD BE REIGHT FOR CLARIFYING FOR SOMOZA U.S. GROUND RULES FOR RETURN TO MORE NORMAL AND HARMONIOUS U.S.-NICARAGUAN RELATIONS.

7. AMBASSADOR WOULD BE ABLE TO TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF HIS ESTABLISHED SERIES OF FRANK DISCUSSIONS ON U.S.-NICARAGUAN RELATIONS WITH SOMOZA TO RAISE THE ELECTION ISSUE IF DEPARTMENT SO AUTHORIZES PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE. AS A RESULT, A NEW AMBASSADOR WOULD BENEFIT FROM HAVING THE SEED ALREADY PLANTED WHICH HE COULD NOURISH RATHER THAN HAVE TO BREAK NEW GROUND WHILE ESTABLISHING HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH PRESIDENT SOMOZA IN PRESENT HIGHLY SENSITIVE POLITICAL CONTEXT.

8. INSTRUCTIONS ARE URGENTLY REQUESTED FROM DEPARTMENT AS TO WHETHER AMBASSADOR SHOULD MAKE AN INITIAL REPRESENTATION TO PRESI-
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DENT SOMOZA ON FREE 1978 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ALONG LINES SUGGESTED ABOVE, PERHAPS IN AMBASSADOR'S FINAL INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENT.
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